DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 203 813 HE 014 082

AUTHOR Bragg, Ann Kieffer
TITLE The Socialization of Academic Department Heads: Past Patterns and Future Possibilities. ASHE Annual Meeting 1981 Paper.
PUB DATE Mar 81
NOTE 19p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (Washington, DC, March 3-4, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Characteristics; *Administrator Role; Comparative Analysis; Curriculum Development; *Department Heads; Employment Experience; Enrollment; Faculty Evaluation; Financial Support; Grantsmanship; Higher Education; *Leadership Responsibility; Productivity; Program Administration; Research Opportunities; Resource Allocation; *Role Perception; *Socialization; *Teacher Administrator Relationship; Teacher Employment
IDENTIFIERS *ASHE Annual Meeting

ABSTRACT

The way that department heads learn the chair role was studied through interviews with 39 department heads randomly selected from nine colleges within a single university. Four types of roles were identified. Faculty-oriented department heads described their primary responsibilities as recruiting, developing, and evaluating faculty members; facilitating the work of the faculty; and reducing intradepartmental conflict. Externally-oriented department heads described their primary responsibilities as representers, brokers, negotiators, or grantsmen, and their goals were to increase both the number and funding level of research grants and contracts, to obtain additional space and equipment, and to enhance the department's image. Program-oriented department heads described their primary responsibility as program development. Among their goals were to increase the number of student-credit-hours generated and the number of undergraduate majors and graduate students in their departments. Management-oriented department heads described their primary responsibilities as leadership, facilitator, or coordinator to indicate that their job was to procure and allocate departmental resources and to effectively run the department. Perceived sources of stress, important extradepartmental involvement, and patterns of socialization were also identified for each type of department head. Among the responses are the following: externally-oriented department heads derived their role expectations from experience as successful grantsmen or as leaders in professional associations, while program-oriented department heads reported that their experience as practicing professionals or as academic administrators influenced their role expectations. Implications for the selection and training of department heads are considered. (SW)

ED203813

The Socialization of Academic Department Heads: Past Patterns and Future Possibilities

Ann Kieffer Bragg

Director, Educational Relations

The Pennsylvania State University

Paper presented on the panel on "The Socialization and Training of Academic Department Heads: Research and Practice" at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Washington, D. C., March 4, 1981

IDE 014082

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Ann Kieffer Bragg

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Association for the Study of Higher Education

The George Washington University / One Dupont Circle, Suite 630 / Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 296-2597

This paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Washington Hilton in Washington, D.C. March 3-4, 1981. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

Annual Meeting — March 3-4, 1981 — Washington Hilton
Washington, D.C.

Unlike department heads in business and industry, most academic department heads receive no formal training in management or administrative skills. The assumption in academe appears to be that if one has been a professor, one can be a department head.

The purpose of my research was to determine how department heads learn the headship role. Specifically, I set out to answer three research questions:

1. How do department heads define the headship role?
2. How are individual department heads socialized to perform the headship role?
3. What relationship, if any, exists between the pattern of socialization and the department head's definition of the headship role?

The literature on professional and adult socialization suggested several common elements. In their book, Becoming Professional, Bucher and Stelling examined four socialization factors: role playing, or experience in performing actual role tasks; role models; peer group interactions; and coaching and criticism. Brim in 1966 suggested that adult socialization is interactive, i.e., that the adult being socialized, unlike the child, is an active participant in the process by selecting and evaluating experiences, values, and role models. Finally, Thornton and Nardi suggested that the socialization of a role incumbent proceeds in stages, beginning with the transmission of behavioral expectations by way of formal documents such as job descriptions and handbooks, proceeding through informal peer interaction to transmit attitudinal expectations, and concluding with the incumbent shaping the role to fit him/herself.

It was apparent from these and other studies that expectations and feedback on performance, the crux of the socialization process, might

come from several sources: the self, through experience, and a variety of socializing agents, such as deans, positive and negative role models, and peers (see Table 1). Any or all might influence the department head's self-evaluation. In addition, the process might stretch over a considerable period of time, beginning perhaps with the individual's experience as a graduate student or as a beginning faculty member (anticipatory socialization), and should include an examination of the search/selection process as a likely time for expectations to be transmitted as well as of experiences during incumbency.

At the same time, the literature on the role of department heads and role conflict suggested that the headship role was not monolithic. A number of researchers identified various constellations of related tasks within the overall headship role, constellations which formed sub-roles. For example, McLaughlin, Montgomery and Malpass identified three sub-roles: the academic, the administrative, and a leadership sub-role. Smart and Elton in 1976 identified 27 separate tasks which they combined to form four distinct factors: a faculty role, a coordinating role, a research role, and an instructional role. Roach also suggested that department heads wear four separate hats. Although the configurations differed among these three studies, the possibility was raised that an individual department head might define the headship role by emphasizing one of these sub-roles. In addition, as Dressel, Johnson, and Marcus suggested in The Confidence Crisis (1970), the way the department head defines his/her role may not be congruent with the expectations held by the dean and the departmental faculty, resulting in role conflict or ambiguity.

Table 1

The Socialization Process

Possible Sources of Role Expectations & Feedback	Possible Time Frame		
	Anticipatory (Early career)	Search, Selection & Orientation Process	Incumbency
1. Self			
2. Socializing Agents			
a. Superiors (Deans, Central Administration, Institutional policy statements)			
b. Role Models (positive & negative)			
c. Peers			

To answer the three research questions, I developed and pilot tested an interview protocol. I then selected 39 department heads randomly from nine colleges within a single, complex university to participate in the study. These 39 represented two-thirds of those who were permanent (i.e., not acting or interim) heads of departments which had the full-range of responsibilities comprising the university's mission, i.e., both graduate and undergraduate degree programs, research, and public service.

Those selected headed departments ranging in size from 4 to 65 members, not including themselves, with a mean of 22 members. The period of incumbency ranged from 6 months to 14 years, with a mean of 5 years. At the time of appointment, the typical department head was a 46-year-old male "full" professor, who had received his terminal degree 15 years earlier. Almost equal numbers had been appointed from within as from outside the departments they now headed.

Analysis of the interview responses indicated the department heads did, indeed, emphasize particular sub-roles in defining the headship. Using responses to the four questions on role definition which discriminated among department heads, I derived four ideal types of department head role definition. (See Table 2).

Faculty oriented department heads described their primary responsibilities as recruiting, developing, and evaluating faculty members, facilitating the work of the faculty, and reducing intra-departmental conflict to improve faculty morale. Their primary goals at time of appointment were to improve the quality of the faculty, to maintain departmental quality standards, to increase opportunities for faculty research, and to reduce conflict among faculty members. Their

Table 2

Interview Responses by Role Definition Typology

Interview Responses	Role Definition Typologies: Faculty Orientation	External Orientation	Program Orientation	Management Orientation
Perceived Primary Responsibility	Faculty development, Facilitator, Conflict reducer	Representer, Negotiator, Grantsman	Program development	Coordinator, Leader, Facilitator
Goals at time of appointment	Improve faculty quality & research opportunities, Reduce conflict	Increase grant funding, space, & equipment, Enhance image	Develop a model program, Change program direction, Increase SCH productivity	Reorganize for efficiency & productivity, Improve morale, Increase prestige
Sources of Stress	Faculty appointment & evaluation, Time for own research	Finances, Research productivity	Faculty appointment & productivity, Inadequate start-up funding	Resources, Interpersonal conflict, Nonproductivity
Important Extra-departmental Involvement	Professional Associations	Professional Associations & external funding agencies	University-wide governance	College & university governance

primary stresses were also faculty related: They were concerned about the lack of time they had to devote to their own research and about faculty hiring, promotion, and tenure. They felt that department head involvement in professional associations was particularly important in order for the department head to keep up in his field and in order to facilitate the recruitment of new faculty members.

Externally oriented department heads described their primary responsibilities as representers, brokers, negotiators, or grantsmen. Their goals at time of appointment were quite specific: to increase both the number and funding level of research grants and contracts, to obtain additional space and equipment for research/creativity, and to enhance the department's image. Their primary causes of stress were a slowing in the availability of research funding and low research productivity. They felt that the department head had to be particularly involved in professional associations and in working with state, federal, and private funding agencies.

Program oriented department heads described their primary responsibility as program development. Their goal at time of appointment was to create the best degree program possible. They wanted to increase the number of student-credit-hours generated and the number of undergraduate majors and graduate students in their departments. They also were keenly aware of changes in direction within the discipline or profession to which the department needed to respond. Two areas caused them stress: the inability to obtain funding to "start-up" a new program (to hire new faculty and purchase instructional equipment) and the slowness of the bureaucratic structure of the university regarding curriculum approval. Perhaps for this last reason, most felt that it was

important for the department head to be involved in university-wide governance.

Management oriented department heads were the least consistent in their resp nses. They described their primary responsibilities as "leadership," "facilitator," or "coordinator" to indicate that their job was to procure and allocate departmental resources and to "effectively run" the department. At appointment their goals were to organize or reorganize the department to increase its prestige and productivity. They were interested primarily in the efficiency and effectiveness of departmental operations. Stress was caused by intra-departmental conflict which interferred with cooperation and, hence, with efficiency and productivity; with nonproductive faculty members; and with the need to allocate fewer resources than they felt were needed to be effective. They felt it was particularly important for department heads to be involved in both college and university governance.

Conspicuous by its absence in these descriptions is the "professorial" sub-role. All attempted to continue the role of professor, i.e., teaching and advising students, conducting research or creative work, and/or performing public services. They did not include this sub-role in their definition of the headship, however, because it did not differentiate them from the rest of the faculty members in their departments.

Once the four ideal types had been constructed, I examined the socialization of department heads within each type. Again, the overall pattern of socialization within one type differed from the overall pattern of each other type. (See Table 3).

Table 3

Department Head Socialization by Role Definition Typologies

Socialization Elements	Role Definition Typologies: Faculty Orientation	External Orientation	Program Orientation	Management Orientation
Helpful Prior Experience	None	As grantsman or Association Leader	12 years as professional or administrator	as administrator
Peers Identified	Faculty	Other heads and faculty	Other heads	Other heads
Interaction with other heads	New - yes Old - no	Yes	Yes	Yes
Interaction with dean (mode)	once/month	once/month	twice/month	once/month
Role Models Identified	Research Scholars (+)	Faculty & Professionals (+)	Charismatic Faculty & Professionals (+)	Predecessor (-) Other administrators (- & +)
Self-Characterization	Faculty	Faculty	Both	Administrator
Post Headship Career Plans	Return to faculty to research	Consider other administrative position	Return to faculty to teach	No pattern

At one extreme, the pattern of socialization of faculty-oriented department heads was dominated by an identification with the faculty. They reported little or no work experience outside academe and reported that no prior experiences, aside from being a professor-researcher, had been helpful to them in learning their headship role. They identified scholars whom they admired for their research as positive role models. They identified the departmental faculty, especially senior faculty members, as their peers. They considered themselves faculty members rather than administrators, were negative toward "administration," and planned to return to full-time faculty status to pursue research when their headship terms were completed.

At the other extreme, management-oriented department heads derived their expectations of the headship role not from experience as a teacher-scholar but from their prior experience as administrators. They identified other department heads as peers and identified as negative role models their predecessors and other administrators, whom they described as inaccessible and autocratic. They considered themselves administrators and seemed to enjoy being department heads.

Externally oriented department heads derived their role expectations from associations within their field of study, reporting experience outside academe either as successful grantsmen or as leaders in their national professional associations. They identified former professors and practicing professionals, people committed to and highly successful in the field, as positive role models. They considered both departmental faculty members and other department heads to be their peers, and a few also cited deans or associate and assistant deans as peers. They did not

see a dichotomy between faculty and administrative statuses and expressed openness to the possibility of assuming another administrative position.

Although program-oriented department heads also derived role expectations from their experiences within their fields, the pattern of socialization differed from that of externally oriented heads. Program-oriented department heads reported an average of twelve years of prior experience as practicing professionals or as academic administrators. Unlike department heads in the other typologies, program-oriented department heads identified charismatic role models: either practicing professionals or former professors, who were "towering figures" in the field but who were, nevertheless, interested in them when they were students or neophytes. They considered other department heads to be peers and considered themselves faculty members in some situations and administrators in others. On the average, they met more frequently than did other department heads with the deans of their colleges. They planned to return to full-time faculty status when they stepped down from the headship.

Referring again to Table 1, several items originally assumed to be important are absent from these four patterns of socialization. First, responses to questions on the search, selection, and orientation processes did not discriminate among department heads. More than half of the department heads could not recall any kind of charge having been given by the dean, and 92 percent reported none from the search committee or departmental faculty at the time of their appointments. Instead, many described an interview process in which they did most of the talking, outlining their priorities and the directions in which they felt the department should move. The resulting impression was that their

appointment was an implicit agreement by the dean and the faculty with the directions and priorities they had outlined.

Fully 82 percent reported no orientation of any kind. Most department heads were simply provided policy manuals and given instructions to call if they had any questions.

The second missing element is a clear evaluation or feedback process. Department heads apparently talked among themselves and saw their deans rather frequently on the average. Only one-quarter, however, indicated that their deans evaluated them annually. The rest relied on periodic formal reviews by others or more informal means for feedback. One in eight, for example, felt the dean implicitly provided feedback through annual salary increases and/or through the number of special requests he granted. The danger in relying on implicit evaluations such as these is that the message can be easily misconstrued.

Nonetheless, most department heads reported a positive self-evaluation. Self-evaluation was based on criteria of the individual's own choosing, such as level of research productivity, external funding levels, successful recruitment of graduate students, etc., rather than on evaluations by others. By choosing as criteria areas in which they excelled, most department heads were able to maintain a "successful" self-image.

Although they positively evaluated their performances, most department heads expressed frustration in juggling the perceived important tasks of leader, manager, and scholar. There was simply not enough time to do all that seemed to be expected. The lack of clear and consistent expectations and the inadequacy of feedback exacerbated feelings of role ambiguity. Although they had defined their roles

according to one of these four ideal types, they had no concrete indications that the dean and departmental faculty concurred. Academic institutions have tended to interpret role ambiguity as freedom. Vagueness in position descriptions and role expectations appears beneficial; it appears to permit individuals the latitude to develop their roles according to their special skills and talents. This research, however, suggests that there may be a point at which ambiguity becomes counterproductive and wasteful of talent, a loss both to the individual and to the institution.

What are the implications, then, for the future orientation and training of academic department heads? First, these findings suggest that institutional expectations for the headship role, need to be clarified. Clarification of roles could occur at two points: during the search/selection process and during the initial orientation period of the new incumbent.

During the search process, these findings suggest that deans and search committees could use background information on candidates to identify those best suited to the needs of the department. For example, if the dean and the faculty were to agree that the department's primary thrust should be on the establishment of a model program designed to reflect changes in the field and to produce first-rate graduates, then these data suggest that they should seek an experienced practicing professional who had worked with and espouses the beliefs of the "giants" in the field (a program-oriented department head). On the other hand, if the department were in a state of chaos, with the faculty members "doing their own thing" and productivity declining, then these data suggest that the dean should seek an experienced administrator with a reputation for

successful operation in a collegial setting. Used for the initial screening of prospective candidates, this information could then serve as a basis for discussion during the interview process. Such an approach assumes, however, that there is a mechanism for analyzing departmental needs.

Second, rather than simply a "getting to know you" or "selling" process in which candidates "sell" themselves to the department and dean, the interview process could be an exchange of information so that the candidates, the dean, and the department can determine whether a particular candidate might fulfill the department's and dean's expectations and vice versa. Often in the selection procedure, too much emphasis is placed on a single interview. Instead, a series of interviews with prospective candidates or additional visits by the new department head after selection but before assumption of the position would afford the opportunity for articulating role expectations more clearly. At some point, the search and selection process needs to include the clarification of expectations of the headship role by all parties involved--the candidates, the dean, and the departmental faculty members--to avoid later ambiguity.

No matter how well suited the selection process is in meeting the needs of the department, however, department heads also require some orientation to their new role. The most important means of learning the headship role appeared to be through interaction with other department heads. Several department heads expressed gratitude for a kind of "big-brother" relationship they had had with an experienced department head when they first assumed the headship position. Others seemed to seek out and benefit from the informal interaction with department heads

in related fields. These informal relationships among department heads were the principal means of conveying the university's political and social culture. Where the informal network is not well established, the dean might consider setting up a pairing system as one means of orienting new department heads to the headship role and to the institution.

Another possibility is to provide on-campus workshops for new department heads and as "refresher" courses for experienced department heads. Experienced department heads within a college could organize sessions for their new colleagues. Although all new department heads may benefit from an orientation designed to impart the institution's decision-making organization, policies, and procedures, this research suggests that department heads within each ideal type may need assistance in different areas. Faculty-oriented department heads, for example, may benefit particularly from a workshop on techniques of budget management, while a session on external sources of funding might be more useful to program-oriented department heads. Management oriented department heads, instead of participating in on-campus sessions, might be encouraged to participate in organizations and workshops for department heads sponsored by a number of professional and disciplinary associations in order to keep them in touch with their fields. Some kind of orientation to the headship role as well as to the institution is needed.

Finally, in addition to clearer expectations for performance, department heads appear to need more adequate feedback. From this study, it is apparent that department heads would benefit from formal evaluations on a regular basis from the deans of their colleges. An annual evaluation by the dean and a periodic review by a committee of

department heads (their peers) would provide the feedback needed to improve performance.

A clear and consistent presentation of expectations to department heads during the selection and orientation processes and formal evaluation of performance by the dean and by peers could reduce the department head's sense of role ambiguity. The aim of these suggestions is not to produce "happy" department heads, but rather to remove some of the barriers that seem to be preventing growth and creativity in role performance.

REFERENCES

Brim, Orville G., Jr. "Adult Socialization," pp. 182-226 in Socialization and Society, ed. by J. A. Clausen. Boston: Little-Brown, 1968.

---, and Wheeler, Stanton. Socialization After Childhood: Two Essays. New York: John Wiley, 1966.

Bucher, Rue and Stelling, Joan G. Becoming Professional. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1977.

Clausen, John A. "Socialization as a Concept and as Field of Study," pp. 2-17 in Socialization and Society. Boston: Little-Brown, 1968.

Dressel, Paul L.; Johnson, F. Craig; and Marcus, Philip M. The Confidence Crisis: An Analysis of University Departments. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1970.

McLaughlin, Gerald W.; Montgomery, James R.; and Malpass, Leslie F. "Selected Characteristics, Roles, Goals, and Satisfactions of Department Chairmen in State and Land-Grant Institutions," Research in Higher Education 3 (1975): 243-259.

Merton, Robert K. "The Role-Set: Problems in Sociological Theory," British Journal of Sociology 8 (1957): 106-120.

Mortimer, Jeylan T. and Simmons, Roberta G. "Adult Socialization," Annual Review of Sociology 4 (1978): 421-454.

Roach, James H. "The Academic Department Chairperson: Functions and Responsibilities," Educational Record 57 (Winter 1976): 13-23.

Smart, John C., and Elton, Charles F. "Administrative Roles of Department Chairmen," New Directions for Institutional Research 10 (Summer 1976): 39-60.

Thornton, Russell and Nardi, Peter M. "The Dynamics of Role Acquisition," American Journal of Sociology 80 (4) (1975): 870-885.